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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 6

QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1997]

1. With few exceptions, the economic and social situation of African countries is steadily worsening. All of Africa is marginalized on the world market, where it accounts for only a small percentage of trade. The majority of public assistance and private investment is allocated to a very small number of States. Even these "beneficiary" countries are experiencing growth unaccompanied by social improvement or genuine development. No African State has even partial control of its development policy. The industrial Powers and international financial institutions are taking on that role in all areas, including that of currency.

2. Africa is also suffering from the competition and rivalry between the major Powers, which are in the process of re-establishing their spheres of influence in a repetition of the practices of the nineteenth-century Berlin Congress. The African peoples, already undermined by the problems resulting from inter-ethnic relations, are exploited by Powers outside the continent which provoke conflicts, such as those in Nigeria and Zaire, and even genocide, as in Rwanda. The dismantling of the African State and public

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services in Somalia, Liberia, Zaire and other countries is continuing and facilitates additional interference that benefits only transnational firms or business-client networks.

3. Despite the prevailing state of abject poverty, there is considerable South-North cash flow, even to the point of financing some Western political parties which, in exchange, provide the (sometimes military) means of stabilizing the position of pseudo-elite leaders. Genuine progress in the fields of human rights and democracy is impossible in such a context. Democratic institutions, when established, are often subverted, as when elections are rigged or a multi-party system merely follows the pattern of a multi-ethnic society.

4. The Powers consider democracy to be a product capable of being imported and exported; only one "model" for political systems is proposed, and often imposed, in Africa even though it is inconsistent with the continent's culture, history and socio-economic reality. The imposition of democracy as a condition for agreements between European and African States is, in fact, just another attack on the principle of sovereignty, even if it serves the purposes of some opposition groups.

5. Overall, the African peoples are the victims of these aberrations: they seek, by the only means available to them, to escape armed conflicts (resulting in a mass of uprooted and unwelcome refugees), repression (increasing restrictions are being placed on the right to asylum in Europe) and abject poverty (the informal economy continues to develop, thereby contributing to great inequality and the disruption of all aspects of social activity). The judicial system is still in search of a code capable of inspiring the necessary confidence on the part of those accused, and usually the rule of law is merely a concept, particularly in view of the widespread corruption.

6. While there are many endogenous causes of the situation of human rights in Africa, it is the African peoples who are best able to deal with and overcome them. But such progress will be possible only if the exogenous causes are removed, which implies debt cancellation, reconsideration of structural adjustment policies dictated by financial institutions according to a standard model, military and political non-interference, the occupation of political posts by Africans, and genuine cooperation, both North-South and intra-African, on the basis of mutual interests.

7. Criticism of repressive practices in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa does little to advance the cause of human rights and sometimes serves to legitimize the racism which is becoming increasingly widespread in Europe. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights can best contribute to the cause of human rights in Africa by promoting knowledge of the fundamental causes of the situation of human rights on that continent and by making known the relationship between the endogenous and exogenous causes of practices that constitute violations of human rights and the rights of peoples, thereby making it possible to identify the respective responsibilities of Africans themselves, and non-Africans, for the fate of peoples.



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ADVISORY SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1997]

1. One of the great merits of the Commission on Human Rights is to dispel the fog surrounding violations of human rights through State practices and thus to establish more favourable conditions for human rights to be respected, in conformity with the international commitments of States. However, there is no denying the discriminatory element in the positions taken and the inequitable role played by certain great Powers, beyond any form of scrutiny whatsoever, which prevent the condemnation of "protected dictatorships", while ensuring the censure of States who are their political adversaries. The cause of human rights would certainly benefit if, rather than attacking or defending particular States, a study was made of the fundamental, direct and indirect causes of the human rights violations committed in States (their economic, social, cultural, political and institutional causes, etc.) and if short- and long-term remedies were sought.

2. In these times of globalization and construction of a "transnational civil society", the wish for partnership with the NGOs is often expressed; however, it occasionally appears to reflect a desire further to reduce the powers of the authorities, in line with the prevailing liberalism.

Nonetheless, where human rights are concerned, such a partnership is particularly operative, provided that the NGOs are uninfluenced by reasons of State and are not surrogates of the great Powers; in addition, systematically resorting to NGOs, within the framework of the Commission on Human Rights, to identify the causes of and remedies for human rights violations would be particularly effective. NGOs are less effective, however, as substitutes for States. The creation by North-South XXI of the North-South Institute for intercultural dialogue has been inspired by such a desire to find an explanation for the rationale of repression and to determine the relationship between democracy and development by means of a multidisciplinary approach.



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FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by North-South 21, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1997]

1. The fundamental aspect of the Vienna Declaration on human rights adopted by consensus in June 1993 is the rejection of the distinctions made in the past between the various human rights. Certain rights were considered to have priority and binding force, whereas others were held to be mere political declarations of intent without any positive value. The international community has thus solemnly recognized the strict equality and interdependence of all rights and freedoms: individual and collective, political and civil, or economic and social rights.

2. However, the Declaration of Vienna did not receive widespread media coverage. Certain States, which in fact are not favourably disposed to the identical treatment of, for example, the freedom of origin and the right to development or political and social democracy, but which are not politically able to formally oppose this Declaration, are endeavouring to deny it publicity or to find anything positive in it.

3. Certain non-governmental organizations are doing the same. At the closing meeting of the fifty-second session of the Commission on Human Rights in 1996, the Director of the Centre for Human Rights expressed regret that certain States did not accord it any practical importance.

4. It is therefore proposed that the Declaration of Vienna should be systematically distributed by United Nations bodies to the international public, and that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights should call on all States to transform this Declaration into a convention with binding force.

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INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1997]

1. The establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations is a considerable step forward in United Nations policy for the recognition and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples.
2. The repeated delays in preparing the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, however, seriously undermine the credibility of United Nations bodies, at a time when many of the Amerindian peoples are living in a state of complete deprivation. Obstacles to the completion of the draft declaration are due, it appears, both to divisions within the Amerindian movement, which are carefully maintained by those whose interests are threatened by the Amerindian resurgence (particularly in connection with the land rights claimed by the Amerindians), and by certain world or regional Powers. The highest priority, and the only possible way for the Amerindian peoples to achieve their rights, is through the unity of the representative indigenous movements and the solidarity without interference of the other NGOs throughout the world.

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3. The poor status of the Amerindian movement today and the status it has the potential to achieve are significant: they reflect the actual importance attached by States to human rights, in that some States fear the Amerindian resurgence while others have nothing to gain from it. The rich Amerindian culture, which is a part of the common heritage of mankind, and the right of the Amerindian peoples to decide their own fate and recover their property for the purpose of exercising their right to development justify the Commission on Human Rights taking the necessary steps to expedite the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, followed by the declaration itself.

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